

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE/CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT
PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

October 10, 2003

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act programs was held on Friday, October 10, 2003 at the Richmond Police Training Academy in Richmond.

Members Present

Fred Orelove, Chair
Lauren Caudill
Michael Hall
Paul Hirschbiel
Kent Hymel
Eric Olsen
Fred Orelove
Pat Romano
Ruth Stone
B. J. Zarris

Members Not Present

Sharon England
Pat Kelleher
Mindy Loiselle
Mary Evans

DCJS Staff Present

Denise Marks
Laurel Marks
Holly Oehrlein
Melissa O'Neill
Erin Osborne

Call To Order

Fred Orelove called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

Introduction of Members

Each member introduced themselves to the committee members.

Approval of Minutes from July 25th Meeting

Fred Orelove asked if there were any changes to be made. There being none, Paul Hirschbiel requested that they be approved and Mike Hall seconded. The minutes were approved.

Citizen Review Panel (CRP)

The Differential Response System (DRS) subcommittee met one hour prior to the general meeting. Present from the subcommittee on DRS were Sharon England, Lauren Caudill, Ruth Stone and BJ Zarris. Printouts from OASIS were provided on 6 children who each had 3 or 4 CPS reports. The intent was to show the subcommittee the kinds of information that can be obtained from OASIS in order to take this into account in deciding how to proceed with a case review.

After some discussion, the subcommittee stated a preference for pulling a sample of CPS cases with problematic outcomes. Those pulled would include all referrals on the families to be reviewed, including ongoing case information in the hard copy record as well as OASIS, and might include worker interviews as well.

The cases that appear (anecdotally) to not be receiving the needed intervention are related to several significant factors at the local level. Issues identified include: lack of resources, lack of knowledge or skills on the part of some staff to do adequate safety and risk assessments, and/or lack of support and reinforcement from supervisors who may be stretched to the max or who lack training on assessment.

The subcommittee is concerned that Family Assessment is being used as a catchall and that assessments are not really addressing safety and risk. There is concern that there has been a tendency to screen out some situations that are not “serious” to the degree of needing an investigation. There is also concern that in the past year the use of the court to ensure safety has diminished. Chesterfield and Bedford were cited as examples of localities where use of court is known to have decreased dramatically.

The subcommittee suggested that the next DRS evaluation needs to include surveys of judges, GALs, CASAs and community service providers. They also suggested contacting staff at the Supreme Court to determine if the number of EROs, PROs, etc. has gone down statewide since DRS was implemented.

The subcommittee considered the issue of resources to conduct a case study. The limited number of cases that could be reviewed by our committee would not constitute a valid sample in order to draw reliable or credible recommendations. We also need to be very clear about the questions we are trying to address with the review.

These concerns were shared with the larger committee and their input was sought. The consensus was that the CRP would like to recommend a Special Review to determine if there is elevated recidivism since

the implementation of DRS. One suggestion was to have the localities identify cases where there have been several repeat referrals or that are problematic in some way.

Other questions from the group included: Is the recidivism significant? Does Investigation make the services more available? How has the lack of any new resources impacted localities' view of DRS, and therefore, the investment in change? Are people interpreting DRS as a way to defer further intervention needed to keep kids safe rather than as a way to learn more about the less defensive family and thus keep kids safer? Are there some dynamics occurring in CPS in Virginia that are being attributed to DRS, but are more likely the result of the fact that most localities have not gotten any additional resources in the past 15 years to work with increasingly complicated situations? Have some localities interpreted the DRS statutes, as they were altered by the General Assembly 2000, to really mean we should take a less active role in families even when there are abuse/neglect allegations? What does the state need to provide in training and policy to get across the clear message that the safety of children is still the highest priority of CPS – and DRS IS CPS?

Structured Decision Making Project

Ms. Zarris reported on the Structured Decision Making (SDM) project that the State DSS is in the process of implementing. The state has contracted with Children's Research Center which is associated with National Council of Crime and Delinquency. They have implemented SDM in approximately 14 states. A handout was distributed to committee members and Ms. Zarris indicated that she could bring additional materials if the members were interested to a future meeting. Structured Decision Making is designed to assist workers in making decisions in the field in a more consistent fashion. There is a SDM steering committee that will meet next week and Sharon England has agreed to serve as a representative of this committee.

Surrogate Parents and CASA / CASA Program Update

Melissa O'Neill handed out results of a recent survey of the CASA programs. She received 20 responses from 26 programs. Only two programs have ever been asked to serve as a Surrogate Parent for a CASA child and of those two programs only one program does actually serve in that role. All of the respondents indicated that they would like to attend IEP meetings but indicated that getting notification of meetings was routinely problematic. These results were discussed with the committee members. It was reported that as a result of this survey, it seems that the Surrogate parent issue is not as much of a concern as we originally thought with CASA programs. Ruth Stone commented that she feels that there should still be a guidance policy. Often programs are placed in difficult positions and the guidance policies are helpful to have to refer to. Melissa will draft a policy and present it at the next meeting. It was then reported that programs are interested in the educational advocacy training.

CASA Program Update

Melissa O'Neill attended the CASA State Directors meeting where an announcement was made regarding changing the CASA logo. The reason for making this change is because Court Appointed Special Advocates are not known by this name in all states (GALs, Just for Kids, etc.). The current CASA program logo is owned by a company in Rhode Island and there are restrictions on what can and can't be done with it. There will be an 18-month phase-in for the changeover to the new logo and during this time, both the old logo and the new logo can be used.

Melissa O'Neill then reported that National CASA is doing the Standards Quality Assurance. Ruth Stone reported that her program has devoted about 75 hours to this project so far. This will be a very good process and should improve programs uniformity. This should be a great step on quality improvement for everyone involved. It is required that every CASA program goes through this process within 2 years. A Committee Member asked if there are areas that we "as a board" need to take on. Ruth Stone commented that one issue is how National CASA defines cases; Virginia statutes allow CHINS to have CASA volunteers, where National does not. National also allows 2 children/2 sibling groups per volunteer where Virginia allows 3 children/2 sibling groups. Another issue is the 12 hours of in-service training for volunteers. While our state regulations are in compliance with the National standards, local CASA programs are consistently having difficulty meeting this requirement. Six other programs are scheduled to complete the standards quality assurance self assessment by Dec. 1st and Melissa O'Neill will be doing some technical assistance with them during the next several weeks.

National CASA has just released an independent study version of their training curriculum. This should be of great assistance to the rural programs.

Melissa O'Neill reported the completion of the training survey that Erin Osborne (VCU MSW student intern) assisted with. The two topics that ranked highest were volunteer retention and board management. Since this is an "off conference" year, training will be focused on topics identified by the staff. This should take place sometime in the Spring of 2004. Ms. O'Neill is beginning to develop this training now. With the Board training needs, we want to get creative in how we deliver this training. There is a network meeting on October 21st in Hanover and training will be discussed (possibly working on something individually – assist with individual needs – training, attracting, fund raising, etc.). We have tried to do one day, statewide trainings in the past and they have not been widely successful. So we are looking at ways to deliver this training in a more strategic fashion.

The Semi-Annual CASA Conference will take place in the Fall of 2004 in the southwestern part of the state, possibly Roanoke. Bids are currently out for conference space with a few hotels in the area.

Ms. O'Neill also reported that she is in the process of updating the regulations since they have not been updated since 1998. She passed out a copy of the current regulations. Ms. O'Neill requested input about "Training", specifically the requirement regarding 12 hours of continuing education annually. This area is causing a lot of programs difficulty. It was suggested that being in a courtroom might be considered "training". Rather than sitting in the waiting area while waiting for their case to be called, the volunteer could make arrangements to observe other cases that are being heard that day. In general – all cases are open. The volunteer could check with the court system prior to the start of the hearings for approval. It would not be recommended that all 12 hours be acquired this way, but that some could. Melissa O'Neill also brought up the suggestion that hours could be carried over. National CASA does not allow the carry-over.

Ms. O'Neill also brought up the concern regarding staff working cases. There are still programs where judges are referring cases, but the programs don't have the volunteers available. Since they don't have the volunteers, the staff is following through with these children which makes it a human service organization and not a CASA Program.

Melissa O'Neill reported that COMET (CASA Outcomes Management and Evaluation Tool) is going very well. All programs (with the exception of 2) are using it. At the National CASA meeting, there was discussion about incorporating portions of design specifications developed by the Virginia COMET technician into the upgraded version of COMET that will be released nationally in 2004. We are looking at working on a statewide aggregation feature for COMET beginning in the next 6 months.

Melissa O'Neill was invited to participate in the Child Welfare Advisory Committee, which is the follow-up group that is meeting to do the Program Improvement Plan as a result of the federal review.

There have been quite a few CASA Program Director changes (6 new directors and 2 others as a result of title changes – this is roughly 1/3 of the CASA programs). The Program Director training has been rescheduled to November 17th. At least 4 new directors will be attending this training. A Committee Member inquired whether we have done a statistical analysis of turnover for directors and other staff (reasons, length, etc.). This has not been done, but all the reasons for the changes have been different. One director retired, another took a different job, another left to work part time, another got a job that paid more, etc.

CASA Program Network meeting will take place on October 21st. The sub-committee of the network has been meeting (legislative committee) and plans to seek support for a budget amendment to try to replace the loss of the 15% of the cut in the state funds (\$292,500).

CJA Program Update

The Improving Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse Conference will take place on November 13th and 14th at the Hospitality House in Williamsburg. The agenda is the same as it was for the Spring conference with the exception of a few speaker changes. The brochures for this conference will be mailed next week.

The Forensic Interviewing of Children sessions went very well. There were a total of four trainings held in Ashburn, Weyers Cave, Bristol and Roanoke. We are looking at possibly doing a more extensive training next year with interactive interviewing.

The consultant has completed updating the Virginia Statutes for Child Protection manual. The product was received a few weeks ago and will be ready to distribute in the near future. It was designed to be a compliment to the manual that APRI did on statutes on child protection.

New Business

Fred Orelove asked if anyone had any new business. There being none, the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting will be January 9, 2004 at the Richmond Police Training Academy.